

March 4, 2022

EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

S.B. 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING

H.B. 5283: AN ACT CONCERNING THE EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANT FORMULA AND THE FUNDING OF OTHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

TESTIMONY from Dr. Greg. J. Florio, Ed.D., Executive Director of CREC

Honorable Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Dr. Greg Florio, Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). For 50+ years, CREC has worked with our 35 member Hartford area districts to provide cost-effective and high-quality educational programs and services. We also work together as an alliance with other Connecticut RESCs acting as a statewide network in the procurement of educational services.

I am asking you to support SB 227, which provides critical increased funding to immediately support our magnet schools. I welcome the opportunity to continue discussions on amending HB 5283 as a potential long-term sustainable funding mechanism for CREC magnets and all school districts in Connecticut.

The 8% increase for Sheff magnet schools in SB 227 mitigates tuition increases to school districts, especially Alliance Districts. The state's base funding for Sheff-region magnet schools remains statutorily unchanged for over a decade with only a 2% increase in the per pupil magnet school grant in 2019. This provided short-term relief, but does not cover the full funding needed to sustain magnet schools since it only covers 55% of our operating costs.

The prolonged lack of resolution to these funding issues affects every district, school, and student in our region. ECS increased by 13% from FY12-FY20 while the Sheff Magnet grant remained essentially flat since 2010. Even with the 2% grant increase in 2019, the differential between ECS growth & this flat funding amounts to \$66 million for our districts. Federal ESSR and ARPA funds allowed CREC to operate without increases this year, but the absence of those funds creates a dramatic fiscal cliff. Without an additional investment in the state Sheff Magnet School Grant, CREC's only option is to increase the tuition rates charged to sending districts, especially Alliance districts, beginning FY22. The 8% increase will mitigate the tuition rate increase and cover a portion of escalating costs, while maintaining educational programming for our students and families.

CREC Magnet Schools have made a significant effort to reduce expenditures through cuts to staff and programming and the magnet school programs have run deficits. Without additional funding, a greater burden is placed on local towns as a result of increases in tuition from RESC-operated magnet schools. This year, CREC magnet schools reside in 77 towns across the state with 80% of students coming from Alliance Districts including Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, Manchester, New Britain and Windsor. Without the needed increase in the RESC magnet grant, these towns are disproportionately harmed due to the higher amount in tuition they have to pay to the RESCs. **Please support SB 227 to create an immediate mechanism to cover increasing costs for RESC magnets.**

We are committed to working with the proponents of HB 5283 as a hopeful proposal in creating a long-term funding mechanism that supports RESC magnets and the needs of districts across Connecticut. The current bill, as drafted, is a good faith effort in resolving the lack of sustainable funding; however, the current lag in implementation of funding will unintentionally continue the same long-term funding issue. In addition, CREC and all RESC magnet operators need a safe guard for flat funding, since RESCs do not have a tax base and we need an

additional revenue source to cover operating costs without the ability to charge tuition. We continue to discuss these issues with the proponents and would be able to support an amended bill if we can close the implementation gap and create the safe guard method that RESCs need.

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For more information: [CREC 2021 Legislative Priorities.pdf](#)